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TWO NOTES ON *THE TRIAL OF TREASURE*

Although the editorial comments on the play of *New Custom*, in the Hazlitt-Dodsley edition, have in some cases elucidated the text¹ by references to Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of Martyrs*, the same service is not performed for *The Trial of Treasure*, published in the same volume. In the latter play an allusion made by Just, in the course of an invective against the Papists, is rendered intelligible through an incident recorded by Foxe among instances of persecutions under Mary. This circumstance enables us to date the play, in its present form, somewhat more definitely than has heretofore been possible.²

The characters Just, Trust, and Contentation are engaged in a harmonious discussion of the virtues which they represent, and the opposite vices. In the contribution of Just the emphasis falls on ambition, which, in the words of the speaker,

. . . . Chiefly did reign
Among those that should be examples to other;
We saw how their brethren they did disdain,
And burned with fire the child with the mother.³

Foxe has recorded a single instance, among English martyrdoms, of the burning of a child with its mother. The heading of the section in the *Acts and Monuments* that is devoted to the occurrence runs as follows: "A tragicall lamentable and pitiful History, full of most cruel and tyrannical murther done by the pretended Catholicks upon three Women and an Infant; to wit the Mother, her two Daughters, and the Child, in the Isle of Gurnsey, for Christs true Religion, the year of our Lord 1556 July 18."⁴ The main features

¹ Hazlitt-Dodsley, *Old Plays*, ed. 1874, III; see especially pp. 11, 35.

² The first printed edition is that of 1567, and certain passages indicate that the date of composition is early in Elizabeth's reign. The most significant of these are mentioned by Creizenach, *Geschichte des neueren Dramas* (Halle, 1903), III, 525. See also Halliwell, *Percy Society*, XXVIII, Preface to *The Trial of Treasure*, and Farmer's note in *Anonymous Plays* (London, 1906), Ser. 3, pp. 299-300.

³ Hazlitt-Dodsley, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁴ *Acts and Monuments*, ed. 1684, III, 625. The account of the affair, together with the record of a protracted theological wrangle which took rise from it, occupies pp. 625-32.

of the story are these. The three women referred to in the heading were arrested on suspicion of heresy and sentenced to be burned. One of the women, by name Perotine, was pregnant at the time, and at the first pain of the flames her body burst open and the child fell into the fire. It was rescued by a bystander, but at the command of the bailiff was again thrown into the flames. The brother of Perotine brought supplication to Queen Elizabeth for the punishment of the persecutors in 1562, and all those who had taken active part in the affair were accused.¹

Since this record supplies the only known historical instance which illustrates the words of Just, it is doubtless the source of the allusion. Moreover, the incident would hardly have become sufficiently familiar matter to warrant such a reference until the suit had been brought to court and been made the subject of London talk. One would therefore hesitate to date the play in its present form earlier than 1562.

A further suggestion as to the background of the play draws upon very different material. It will be remembered that the comic relief in *The Trial of Treasure* is supplied almost exclusively by a series of incidents in which one of the characters assumes the rôle of a fractious horse. Inclination, the Vice, after having been forcibly bridled by Just, is mistaken for an actual horse by Greedy-gut, the satellite Vice, who, however, soon recognizes him and is prevailed upon to set him free. Later he is securely bridled again, and after a vigorous resistance led from the stage.

The device, as is seen, is exploited to the utmost, and the crude fun of the affair, largely a matter of kicking and neighing, fits awkwardly into the humorless disputations which constitute the greater part of the play. One would hesitate to credit a dramatist otherwise so consistently lifeless with the invention of this bit of noisy farce; and the record of a much older morality proves beyond question that *The Trial of Treasure* was not the first drama to divert an English audience with "horse play" in this literal sense. Mr. T. S. Graves, in an article which appeared a few years ago,² brings forward,

¹ They submitted themselves to the Queen's pardon, and were later acquitted (Foxe, *loc. cit.*).

² "Some Allusions to Religious and Political Plays," *Modern Philology*, IX, 545-54.

in another connection, a letter written by the Spanish ambassador to England, which describes the performance of a morality at a royal banquet in 1522. The central incident in this play was the forcible bridling, by Friendship, Prudence, and Might, of an unruly horse, who represented in this case the King of France. The allegorical meaning of the incident must have been sufficiently clear to the audience, as it is mentioned both in the ambassador's letter and in Hall's *Chronicle*,¹ which also gives a condensed account of the performance.

The exact nature of the connection between two instances so remote from each other in point of time can hardly be established with certainty, but the similarity of the cases² challenges explanation. Perhaps we should be warranted in supposing that the convention of bridling a human "horse" persisted on the stage from the days of Henry to those of Elizabeth. More reasonably, however, we may infer that the original version of *The Trial of Treasure* belongs near enough to the earlier performance to render imitation of the bridling incident probable. In that case the 1567 edition of *The Trial of Treasure* would represent a revamping of an earlier morality for immediate controversial purposes.³ For lack of data the question must for the present be left open; my present purpose is simply to call attention to the interesting parallel.

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¹ The account of Hall (*Chronicle*, p. 641) is also mentioned by Mr. Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

² There is nothing in either account of the 1522 performance to indicate whether a horse or a man took the part of the recalcitrant King of France. In view, however, of the difficulties of the rôle, which demanded a high degree of responsiveness, it hardly seems worth while to consider the possibility that the King was played by a horse.

³ Such usage was, of course, not infrequent. See Mackenzie, *The English Moralities* (Boston, 1914), p. 46, n. 1, who cites Fleay, *History of the Stage*, p. 64.